



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### NO WHALE MARKERS RECOVERED

Despite the capture of nearly a thousand whales, no harpoon markers were reported found by the U.S.S. Ulysses, only American ship which conducted operations in the Antarctic during the 1939-40 season, according to reports made to the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

Inaugurated by the London Discovery Committee in 1934, whale marking work has since resulted in the tagging of 5,200 of these monster marine mammals. About half this number have been finbacks, the remainder humpbacks and blue whales.

Of those marked, approximately 200 have been recovered at varying intervals, indicating that those whales returned to the same area each summer. The Committee records the date, species, and location of each whale marked, and the marker contains identifying data. Recovered markers are forwarded to the Committee.

During the 1938-39 season, Germany for the first time marked whales in the Antarctic. Forty of her whalers were fitted with equipment for this work and about 50 blue whales, 35 finbacks, and 25 humpbacks were marked.

To date, recovered markers indicate that the stocks of blue and humpback whales are drawn upon more heavily than the finback stock. So far as the past

season's catch by the Ulysses is concerned, this seems borne out by the fact that the catch of blue whales dropped from 554 in 1938-39 to 147, while the catch of finbacks rose from 548 in 1938-39 to 790. Incidentally, the taking of humpback whales during both of those years was prohibited in the Antarctic.

Both physical and psychological effects of harpoon markers on the whale have been studied. It is believed that while the whale is undoubtedly somewhat frightened when intercepting one of the monel metal markers, apparently it does not frighten them away from the hunting field.

So far as the wound itself is concerned, in 62 out of 91 particular cases noted, the wound was reported healed; 29 were reported unhealed with mention of suppuration. In another instance where 97 whales were marked, 93 were reported in good general condition, and four "not so good". Of the four reported in poor condition, one was taken two days after being marked, another about two months later, the third about a year later, and the last, some 22 months later. Thus, it is more than likely that, at least in the first case, its actual physical condition had nothing to do with the whale being marked.

The normal range of a harpoon gun is about 90 feet. A well directed shot at 150 feet can accomplish capture, however. All that is required to mark a whale is to know how to use a gun; a good duckman, for example, might make a good whale marker.

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